

After Death

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Summary: Continued from 'The Terrible Loss'. So uh... read that first.

After Death

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>Vassily, Neophyte, and Anacharis (c) MistressAli<p>

Ok, peoples, this story contains: some violence & swearing... just a warning...

>:) Also, this story continues from "The Terrible Loss"!<p>

Just a note: these ** indicate thought!

Cause if I die tonight

>Would you hold my hand?
Oh, would you understand?

>--The Cranberries "Everything I said"<p>

"After Death"

Chapter 1

The cell bars hummed and crackled with blue energy. Anacharis opened one

>of her yellow eyes and looked around. She was shivering, despite holding the
warm body of Vassily in her arms. He was shaking too, she noticed.

>Gently, she pushed him off her. "Vass," she said. "Vass!"
When he didn't respond, she felt her heart start to quicken, and she shook

>him urgently, hissing his name.
He woke up, looking around groggily. "Ana, stop it," he said. He drew his

>arms close to his body, shaking harder. "It be cold," he whined. His green eyes
darted around the room like frantic moths circling a light. "Where we be?"

>She felt strangely irritated, like shaking him. "We're in Robotropolis,"
she snapped. "Don't you remember? Cyto's dead, Neo too, maybe."

>He let out a sharp cry as he recalled. His body trembled as he drew in a
shaky breath. He was nearly on the brink of tears, his face starting to scrunch

>up as he prepared to wail.
"Be quiet," she said in annoyance, before a sound could escape him. "Just
>shut up."
He buried his face in his hands and was quiet.

>Anacharis stroked her three tails, combing the knots and dirt out with her
fingers. Then she eyed the bars. **Touching those is a bad idea**, she thought. She laughed wildly as she imagined what she'd look like after touching one. Hair and fur sticking out all around her body like a porcupine. Vassily looked at her like she was a lunatic.

>Her laughter changed to a raspy sobbing and she lightly banged her head
against the wall. "We gotta get out of here, Vass," she choked out.

"That won't be a problem," said a voice suddenly. The two captives

>shrieked, whirling around to the tiny window. A robotic face was peering in.
"Or at least not a very big problem," added the robot.

>"Who you be?" asked Vassily. He stood on tiptoes to gaze out the window.
"You be roboticized!"

>"Yes," said the robotic hedgehog. He gave Ana a slight nod. "But I have
my will back."

>"Well duh," said Ana, with a wild screech of laughter.
The hedgehog exchanged a puzzled look with Vassily. The boy threw back

>his shoulders, hoping it would make him feel brave. He was surprised when it
worked. "One of our friends was kilt," he said. "And maybe another one too."

>"We'll talk about it later," said the hedgehog. "Let me get you out of
there first."

Ten minutes later, the trio was standing in front of some junk piles near

>the outskirts of the city. A few 'dead' SWATbots lay around, unfortunate victims
of either Freedom Fighters or Robotnik's rage.

>"All right," said the robotic hedgehog, sitting down on a small pile of
scrap metal. "Tell me what happened."

>Anacharis was still distraught. She paced back and forth, ignoring the
hedgehog's gentle suggestions to sit down and relax. Vassily sat down on

>another small pile and cleared his throat.
"We were lookin' for Knothole, cause we wanted to join the Freedom

>Fighters there. Me, Cyto, Neo, and Ana. We all split up to look like
yesterday or whatever. Neo got caught so we came to rescue her.

But Cyto got

>kilt...." The young ringtail drew a deep breath. "And the fat one...he shot Neo
in the head...he said that it was a roboticizer gun or something. So I guess

>she be under his control. Unless...she be dead too."
"She didn't die," said the hedgehog. "He's got her working already. But I

>think he has plans for her."
"She's his then?" asked Ana suddenly. Her cheeks were wet.
>"For now, yes," said the hedgehog sadly. "It's the same old thing, over
and over."
>"How can she get her will back?" asked Ana.
"It's not easy," said the hedgehog. "Not easy at all."
>He looked down at the ground, scuffing a piece of scrap metal around with
his metallic foot. Then he looked back up and extended his hand towards Ana. "I
>forgot to introduce myself. Charles hedgehog. But you may call me Chuck."
"Hello Chuck," she said, shaking his hand. "I'm Anacharis...Ana."
>"Vassily," said the ringtail.
"So you're looking for Knothole, eh?"
>Ana nodded. "For a while now."
"I can lead you there," said Chuck.

"Knothole!" cheered Vassily. "Finally!" Ana smiled slightly. Somehow, she
>didn't feel so thrilled. Perhaps because Cyto's hearty victory shout would no
longer shake the air.
>Chuck gestured around. "I can't linger because I'll be missed back at my
station."
>"A spy?" asked Vassily.
"Yes, I am," said Chuck, thumping his metal chest with a strong fist. "A
>master spy, of course!" He chuckled softly. "Just talk around. Look for the
princess or Sonic. They'll help you out."
>He waved and raced off into the forest.<p>

Vassily and Anacharis stood still, eyeing the surroundings. Freedom

>Fighters bustled about them, busy in their tasks.
But then a small fox walked up to them. "Hi!" he said brightly.
>"Hello," replied Ana. "We're new here."
"I saw Uncle Chuck bring you in."
>Ana noticed his tails for the first time. "You're a kitsune!" she
exclaimed.
>The little fox beamed. "Yep!"
"I am too," she said. The fox's eyes brightened as she showed him her
>tails.
"Wow," he said. "Three." He laughed. "But I betcha can't fly!"
>"I bet I can't either," she said.
He suddenly sprang into the air, tails whirling like a helicopter. "I
>can," he said, bragging slightly. She watched in amusement as he flew in a
graceful figure-eight.
>"That's quite a trick," she said.
Vassily looked impressed. "That be cool."
>The little fox hovered in the air as he smiled down at them. "My name's
Tails," he said.
>"Anacharis. Ana for short."
"Vassily--Vass."
>Tails landed. "Come on," he urged. "You gotta meet Sonic and Aunt Sally!"
He walked off; they followed. "She's not really my aunt," he added over his
>shoulder.<p>

Tails led them to a tree. A punching bag hung from the tree, swinging

>wildly as a barrage of kicks and punches hit it.
"Aunt Sally!" called the young kitsune.
>The punching bag was stopped by a pair of tan hands. Then Sally moved into
sight from behind the bag. She blew out a deep breath, brushing her brownish-red hair out of her face. She had sapphire-like eyes, and an open vest hung
from her slender, yet strong shoulders.
>"These are some new people!" announced Tails.
Sally looked them over for a moment. Then she smiled---a brilliant sight.
>"Hello," she said cheerfully. "New recruits, I see."
"Yeah," said Vassily. Ana nodded.
>Sally crossed her arms over her chest, looking a bit more shrewd.
"Hate to
Sound rude but how did you find us?"
>"Chuck," said Ana. "He brought us here."
"Hmmm," mused Sally. Sir Charles was a good man, and he wouldn't have
>brought anyone here if he thought they were a danger. She uncrossed her arms,
and extended a hand. "All right. I'm Sally, by the way."

>They introduced, then sat down beneath the tree. Vassily told the story of
how they had been searching for Knothole, been captured, and finally escaped.
>"And now we're here," finished Ana in a hushed voice. "Minus two friends,
but we're here, and we'll help in anyway we can."

Chapter 2

Neophyte moved around in the factory, mechanically working. Inside her body, her mind fought to free itself. Her body was flesh, unlike the
roboticized workerbots around her, but she was just as helpless.
>The roboticizer gun had done this to her, she recalled. She had felt a
small needle puncture her skull and enter her brain when Robotnik had squeezed
>the trigger. It hurt like nothing else, as her thinking-flesh was pierced
through. It must have turned part of her brain to metal, or inserted a mind
>chip, one that allowed her mind to be taken over by Robotnik. Either way, she
was trapped within her body, which only responded to her programming.
>**Damn it**, she thought. **If I get out of this, that fat ass is mine! And that little pointed-nose bastard too.**
She tried to stop her hands from their work. They were building
>something, probably a SWATbot.
She growled inside her head, a growl that got increasingly louder and
>louder. And then suddenly, a cry of pain escaped her lips as her head began to
scream in agony. Something in her brain was shooting out electricity, pulses of
>it. She dropped to her knees, holding her head in her hands.
The pain stopped as suddenly as it had begun. Neo raised her trembling

>hands from her head and forced her eyes to focus. Then she looked from side to
side. The workerbots were still working. They hadn't noticed anything. Then
>she gasped, planting her hands on the ground, arms straight for support.
"I'm...I'm..."
>She raised her hands to her face, running them down her cheeks.
"...free..."
>She rested for a minute, then stood up. **I'm outta here**, she

smirked.
Then she strode out of the factory and stood just outside looking around.

Every so often, Snively would stop typing to glance over at the

>surveillance monitors. He was alone in the command room, because Robo had
decided to take a midday nap. He glanced over now, and gasped aloud. For

>Robotnik's new test subject, the human, was sneaking through the city streets.
"It must have malfunctioned," he muttered. Then he slammed his fists onto

>the keyboard. His work was filled with a gibberish of letters, but he didn't
care. When Robotnik found about Neo's escape, he'd be raging and his fists

>would be aching to hit something. There was no way to hide it. The surveillance
tapes recorded for about five hours, and Robotnik insisted on fast-forwarding

>through all of them in case Sniv had missed something.
The tub of lard has nothing better to do, thought Sniv bitterly, **then to scavenge for my mistakes. And then punish me for them.**

>He shivered suddenly, eyes closing as he imagined Robotnik's absolute
rage, and hugged his skinny body as if to ward off the imaginary fists.

>He got on the intercom and ordered SWATbots to capture her, immediately!
He watched as the robots ran through the city streets, pursuing the girl. He

>swept the monitors, staring at each screen carefully--perhaps that dark shadow
wasn't just a shadow.

Neophyte heard the clanking of robot feet behind her, and was thankful she

>herself was not robotic. Her booted feet moved mouse-quiet.
She slipped through shadows, casting hunted glances around. She crept

>silently past a floating surveillance camera...SpyEyes, Robotnik called them.
The camera was turned the opposite direction, oblivious to her presence.

>She was past it now, and slid into the darkness of an alleyway. She
exited the dark passage, and looked around. More streets, lined with metal

>buildings.
The place was huge!

>She made it to the outskirts of the city with little trouble, and stood
near some junk piles. She risked running across the long stretch of gray

>wasteland to the forest. After walking for awhile, she found a log and sat upon
it to rest and think. **What happened to Cyto? And Ana and Vass?**

An hour later, Robotnik strode into the command center, fully rested and

>alert.
"Did anything happen while I slept, Snively?"

>Robotnik eyed his nephew, noticing how his shoulders slumped.
"What happened, Snively?" he growled, his fists clenching.

>"The roboticizer gun," Snively gulped, "the chip...it must have
malfunctioned...the human escaped..."

>"She has her will?!"
Snively took a step backwards. "Um...it appears that way, sir."

>Robotnik slammed a fist against the wall. His invention had failed...and he was furious! How dare it fail!? How dare Snively lose his test subject!? He

>glared at the little man, causing Sniv to shake violently, taking a few more steps backwards.

>"And you didn't catch her?" Robotnik's voice was acquiring more fury and menace by the second.

>"I tried, sir, I really did...but the SWATbots...they didn't find her..."
But Robotnik would not listen to reason. It didn't matter that Snively had tried...it mattered that he had failed. The fat tyrant's face twisted into a grimace of outrage, an expression Sniv knew all too well. He backed up

>further, until he hit the wall, and then cowered.
"Oh please sir, it's not my fault!" he begged, but Robotnik grabbed him by the collar, yanking him off his feet. Robotnik's eyes glowed red as he stared at Sniv in the face.

>"It IS your fault, you little worm. Everything is your fault." He threw Sniv at the wall, feeling a sense of satisfaction at the cracking sound of impact.
Snively started howling; he had probably cracked a rib or two. Robotnik drew back his foot and kicked his wailing nephew hard in the belly. Then his foot connected with his ribs, and his stomach once again.

>Robotnik stood still for a moment. His fat chest was heaving; he was still plenty angry. He snatched up Sniv, and shook him violently, feeling his anger bounce around in his head. But with every shake he gave his nephew, a small bit of fury would seep out of him.

>Snively gasped for breath. He could feel his uncle's rage, his absolute rage, as his head snapped back and forth from the brutal shaking. Robotnik was so furious--and Snively had no idea when he'd calm down. **I could be dead by then!** he thought in terror; that same thought flashed through his head every time Robotnik started these vicious attacks on him.

Robotnik was finally calm. He was slouched comfortably in his throne-like chair. He glanced over at Snively, who was lying in a twisted heap on the floor; unconscious. He'd been lying there for about an hour now.

>**What a bloody mess**, thought Robotnik, and laughed maniacally. Such a stress reliever. Of course, now he had to watch the surveillance monitors because that weakling couldn't take a little abuse without fainting.
But big deal. Surveillance wasn't difficult...just boring. Robotnik had been amusing himself with thoughts of killing that miserable hedgehog. He played out scene after gory scene in his head, some of them making him chuckle softly.
Someday, one of these scenarios will be true...

Chapter 3

The next morning, Sally was sitting just outside her hut, watching the

>early sun shine through the leaves, turning them a light green. Butterflies
whirled about flowers; it was hard to believe there was a war raging on mornings

>like these. She scuffed at a rock buried in the dirt with the toe of her boot.
A soft cooing noise reached her ears, and she automatically held her hand

>out. A small creature landed on it.
It was part bird, part lizard, with dragon-fly wings. This was their

>messenger between KnotHole and Uncle Chuck in Robotropolis. Sally opened the
little canister on its back, pulling out a note. The messenger cooed and flew

>off.
Sally unrolled the note, her eyes scanning it quickly. It read:

Hello fellow Freedom Fighters,

Just wondering if you've made acquaintance with Vass and Ana yet.

They

>probably told you their story...anyway, I have a little information that may
cheer them up. Their human friend has somehow regained her will and escaped

>into the forest. Robotnik was hopping mad!
Anyway, she should be out in the woods somewhere, wandering around.

Love,

>Your friendly neighborhood spy
Uncle Chuck

Hmmm, we'll have to find her, thought Sally. She stood up, stretching

>lazily, then walked off to find Sonic.
<p>

"That be great!" exclaimed Vass, when Sally told him and Ana about Uncle

>Chuck's note. Ana stared at the ground and nodded, her voice very quiet.
"Yeah, that's good."

>Sally put her hand on Ana's shoulder, aware of her deep shock and sadness
over her friend's death.

>"He'd dead," Ana said in a raspy whisper. "Cyto's dead, and he was the
strongest of us all--and it isn't right...because the strongest are supposed to

>survive."
"He charged in," said Vass. "He wasn't careful."

>The ringtail was handling Cyto's death better than Ana, because he didn't
dwell on it-- he didn't allow himself to dwell on it.

>Sure, he was sad. But it didn't help anyone, including himself, to mope.
There were other things to do. At least, this is what he told himself. **I have to be brave**, was his main thought. **Mama taught me to be brave, and so I have to be brave for Ana, because she needs help.**

>But Ana was too full of guilt and remorse, and depression to put this
behind her. She could've saved Cyto--she just didn't act. She could've. **Why

>didn't I move to save him?** She wondered; every second she wondered this.
"Come on," said the princess gently. "Let's go find your friend."

Sonic found her first. It was no real surprise, what with his racing

>though the forest like blue lightening, sending leaves and pine needles flying.
She was still near the log, sleeping, but all the ruckus Sonic made woke her up.

>"Hello?" she called sleepily.
A blue streak sped by her, then came back, and halted in front of her.

>"Hello, hi, hiya, how ya doin', what's up?"
Neo was not amused by his greeting.

>"You're Sonic," she said.
"That's me--way past cool. You're Neo, right?"

>"Neophyte," she said. "How'd you know?"
"Your friends told me."

>She opened her mouth, but he said, "Hold on to me!"
She shrugged, clasping her arms around his waist.

His acceleration took her breath away, leaving it far behind her. The

>surroundings went by them in the same kind of multi-colored blur a druggie might
experience.

>**This is impossible**, she thought. But it couldn't be--because she was very awake---this was no dream.
He came to a standstill, and she breathed in deeply. She was reeling. **I

>must be high. That incredible speed (no pun intended!) could make anybody high!**
She barely noticed the others until she heard Vass cry, "Neo!"

>"Yep, I found her," said Sonic, smiling widely.
He definitely is an egotistical one. Just look at that proud grin...and >the confident way he stands. Too confident, I think. Kinda like Cyto.<p>

"So, you found Knothole?" she asked Vass, for Ana was staring at the

>ground as they walked. Sonic had raced ahead of them.
"Well...no..." said Vass. "One of the Freedom Fighters led us here."

>"Hmmm... 'bout time." She smiled. "Where's Cyto? Probably ordering around
Knothole, eh?"

>Ana let out a loud strange sob, and Vass's ears drooped. Neo swallowed
hard.

>"Guys...what happened to him?"
"He's gone..." said Ana. "H-he's dead..."

>Neo heard, but her brain refused to comprehend. "What?"
"I said he's dead!" Ana's voice rose shrilly. Then tears spilled out of

>her yellow eyes and she slumped to the ground, sobbing.
The princess and Vass both crouched down to comfort her, but Neo kept

>walking in the direction they were headed.
Her head was high, her neck straight, but silent tears wet her cheeks.

>After awhile, the others caught up with her. The rest of the walk was silent.<p>

Knothole was a bit different than what Neo had expected. She had been
>expecting an almost bootcamp-like place, with barracks for sleeping,
and an
obstacle course, and targets set up, dotted with holes from
laser weapons.
>What she saw was straw-roofed huts, with gardens and a tire-swing on
one
tree, and a few larger buildings like a meeting hall and an
infirmary.
>There was a pool on the edge of the village. She did see some
targets
further back in the trees and some punching bags, and a
building that looked
>like a workshop or a lab.
>**Much more pleasant than bootcamp**,
she decided.

The small campfire outside, with its warm flickering fingers of
yellow and
>orange would have ordinarily soothed Ana. But not tonight. She
peered out of
the infirmary window, where she was sleeping tonight
with Neo and Vass. There
>were no patients at the moment and she was alone.
>Outside, the
Freedom Fighters were laughing and planning a mission for
>early the next morning; to destroy one of Robotnik's stealthbot
factories.
>The door squeaked, and Neo came in. She sat down on one
of the beds,
>pulling back the heavy gray blanket. The white sheet underneath
contrasted
greatly against her dark skin, as she lay on her side,
propping her elbow on the
>bed. Head in hand, she gazed at Ana.
>"How did he die?" she asked.

>Anacharis stiffened. Neo had a habit of being blunt. She never tried
to
phrase words delicately or prettily.
>"He was shot," said Ana, feeling her voice tremble way back in her
throat.
>"In the head with a laser gun."
>"It didn't hurt him," said Neo, more quietly. "Ana...it was
instant." Her
eyes narrowed. "A robot?"
>"No," said Ana. "It was that little guy. The one with the long
nose."
>Neo's eyes narrowed further. "He'll have to die," she said
grimly.
>Anacharis winced. "Neo...come on. Just be quiet."
>Neo thumped the
bed with her fist. "No! This isn't something to be quiet
about! Our friend is dead-and you're just trying to ignore it. Like
it's not
important."
>Ana's mouth dropped open. "What?! You're the one acting like you
don't
care. You're like...oh, Cyto's dead. How nice."
>Neo's eyes were just slits now, and she growled, "Just because I'm
not
crying all over the place like you doesn't mean I don't care.
I
>knew Cyto way longer than you, kid."
>"It's your fault," said Ana.
"It's your fault he got killed...if you
>hadn't gotten captured..."
>Neo rolled over onto her stomach.
"Just shut up."
>Ana turned to look out the window again. Someone had put out the
fire.
>Must be bedtime or something. She pulled her knife out of
her boot and held it in her hands, looking at it. She held the knife
tightly in her left hand, and gently ran the blade over her right
wrist. Increasing the pressure, she felt the blade slice through her
skin. Drawing it away, she saw blood well up in the shallow cut. Then

she sighed, dropping the knife onto the windowsill.

>"I'm not even strong enough to do this," she

whispered.
Neophyte's voice was muffled by the pillow. "You're stronger than you think, Ana, because only the weak go through with that..."

>Ana stared hard at Neo, whose head was buried in the pillow, seemingly asleep. Delicately, she wiped a tear that balanced on the rim of her eye. Then, without looking at Neo, she crawled into her own bed, pulling the sheets and blanket over her head.
She lay, silently crying, when something warm and furry snuggled up against her.

>"Ana, can I sleep with you?"
"Of course, Vass...of course..."

>The kitsune wrapped her arms around the little boy, and fell asleep with a peaceful face.<p>

Chapter 4

The next day

Snively hurried down the hall to the command room. As soon as he entered,

>Robotnik began yelling.
"Snively! I'm going to use your thick little skull for my paperweight!"

>"Why, sir?" asked Snively wearily, holding a hand to his forehead.
"Why? Why!?" Robotnik was furious! "Because the Freedom Fighters busted

>into the stealthbot factory, and trashed the place and your lazy little ass was
in bed, sleeping!"

>Snively sighed, remembering the night before. After finally waking up from
unconsciousness, he had gone to his room, wincing with every step. Once there,

>he had cursed Robotnik, calling him every dirty name there was. His ribs hadn't
been cracked, but they were certainly bruised, and he had an awful headache. His

>gaze had wandered around the room, and lighted on the drawer in his desk. He had
gone through the drawer, finding a bottle of hard liquor that had sat in there

>for more than three years. He thought it would ease the pain, which was still
strong. Bad idea.

>He hadn't been sleeping in, as Robotnik believed, but hung over the
toilet, puking until his throat burned with the acid. Now his head hurt even

>more than last night; there were sharp-clawed creatures in there, ripping his
brain to shreds.

>"Why didn't you watch the surveillance monitors, sir?" he asked irritably. "It's not like it's difficult."
Robotnik shot him a murderous glance. "What!?"

>Snively sighed, putting both hands to his screaming head. "I apologize, sir. It won't happen again."
"It'd better not," growled Robotnik.

>Snively didn't answer.
"Well, nevermind," continued Robotnik. "I have a mission for you, dear

>boy, and for the sake of your personal health, you'd better not screw it up!"
He poked Snively's pointy nose, hard. "I would like you to lead a convoy."

>"To where, sir?"
"To go drilling for oil."

>"Of course, sir. When?" Sniv was never too thrilled about leading
convoys, since the Freedom Fighters always seemed to screw it up, but this time

>he was all for it. He'd get the SWATbots to take charge of the convoy, while he
got some much-needed rest.

Uncle Chuck had a bug set up in the command room, which recorded all of

>Robotnik's conversations--it began recording at the sound of his voice. For two days, Uncle Chuck was not able to pick up the bug. He knew valuable information could be on it to relay to the freedom fighters, but he also knew the importance of not being caught.
Finally, he was able to retrieve the bug.

>"So that's where ole Needlenose went off to," mummered Chuck, as he
listened to the recordings. He had been frustrated ever since Robotnik's nephew

>had departed on some unknown mission, complete with a convey. But he had to
keep a low profile, and keep doing his job as a workerbot, or he would surely be

>noticed and his cover would be blown. So he had continued his work, all the
while worrying and hoping the mission had nothing to do with harming the Freedom

>Fighters.
He took out a piece of scrap paper and wrote a brief note to the Freedom

>Fighters. It read:<p>

Dear friends,

I'm sorry I didn't inform you of this sooner. Robotnik sent Snively

>off with a convey to go drilling for oil. The convoy should be heading back any
day now. It would hurt Robotnik to lose all that oil (hint hint!). If you

>decide to go after it, good luck!<p>

Love always,

>Uncle Chuck<p>

"I want to go," said Anacharis, later that night.

>"Me too," said Vass.
Sally was silent as she tossed the note into the flames of the evening

>fire. She was cautious in letting the newcomers go after the convoy. They
could be playing a trick, and give the location of KnotHole away to Robotnik.

>Sally doubted they were traitors, but it was not unlikely. She sighed heavily.
Sonic met her eye, and gave a slight nod. His eyes read: Trust them, Sal.

>Give 'em a chance.
"All right," said Sally. "But Sonic will go with you."

>"Aw man," said Vass, looking disappointed. "I wanted to trash the convoy."
"Don't worry, little buddy," said Sonic. "I'll just keep an eye out to

>make sure nothing bad happens."
Neophyte, sitting under the dark trees, narrowed her eyes slightly. She

>knew Sally mistrusted them. She was not without her reasons, however; Neo knew
Sally was right to be wary.

The next morning, Ana and Vass, along with Sonic, were ready to go.

>Neophyte walked up to the small group.
"I'm coming too," she said.
>Sonic nodded.
"Look Ana," she said, turning to the kitsune. "I'm sorry for that stuff I
>said the other night."
The kitsune nodded, biting her lip. "I'm sorry too. It's not anyone's
>fault."
"Yes...it is," said Neo. "And he's going down today..."
>"All right, gang," said Sonic. "Grab on, and we'll be at that convoy in a
sonic second!"

Chapter 5

The immense oil barrels were filled, and the SWATbots were busy taking
>apart the drilling equipment to bring back to Robotropolis.
Snively watched them out the window for a second, before turning back to
>the console in the main transport unit. He threw a few books he'd been reading
off the console and shoved them under his chair with one foot. Then he reported
>in to Robotropolis.<p>

Robotnik was sketching on a piece of paper, trying to think up ideas for a
>new robot that would really do damage to the hedgehog. Then a holograph
appeared in front of him.
>"What is it, Snively?" he asked, without looking up.
"Well, sir," said Snively, "The drilling's finished."
>Robotnik looked up at the holograph. He could Sniv sitting in the chair,
with his feet propped up on the console, smiling slightly.

>"You're ahead of schedule," noted Robotnik.
"Yes, sir," said Snively.
>Robotnik eyed the corner of a book sticking out from under Sniv's chair.
"Naughty Girls," was the title...complete with two skimpily-clad women on the
>front.
"I'm sure you've been very busy, Snively?" he asked.

>"Oh yes," said his nephew, putting a hand to his mouth. But Robotnik
caught the grin it covered.
>**Damn slacker**, thought Robotnik. But as long as the work's complete...
"That's good," said Robotnik, "very good. Now come home immediately, and
>do NOT lose any of that oil!"
He closed the communication link before Snively could reply.

"Fat piece of shit," Sniv said, then laughed. He leaned back in the chair
>and waited, until a SWATbot came in to report they were ready to leave.
"Well, let's go then," ordered the short man.
>The SWATbot saluted and left.
A few minutes later the convoy started up and began to move towards Robotropolis. The main transport unit was in front, followed by the five oil-
bearing transports. They hovered a few feet over the ground, and moved at a
>speedy pace. Hovercrafts flown by SWATbots escorted the convoy, keeping a close
eye out for intruders.

In a short amount of time, the convoy was traveling through an area filled

>with huge boulders and bushes. Normally, Snively would have taken extreme
caution in such an area, since it was so easily prone to Freedom Fighter

>attacks. But his nose was buried in "Naughty Girls" and it was getting to one
of the many 'exciting' parts. The hovercrafts flew lazily behind the convoy,

>the SWATbots keeping only a moderate watch, since they were not ordered to be
very alert.

Sonic was sitting behind one rock, determined not to interfere with the

>newcomers. He had to watch their actions; see how good they were; see if they
were loyal. **I'll do something dramatic at the very end**, he decided, wanting at least a little part in the mission. To give Robotnik another reason to hate

>him.
Neophyte, Anacharis, and Vassily were hiding behind a group of rocks,

>watching the convoy come into sight.
Vass's hands tightened on a grenade he held. As the convoy came closer,

>Neophyte counted down from ten to one.
"...3....2....1...."

>Grenades flew from their hands, exploding against the surface of the
convoy. The hovercrafts flew around wildly, the SWATbots shouting, "HALT

>INTRUDERS!! "
The main transport unit shuddered to a stop. There were small fires

>burning around the convoy, and small blackened craters where grenades had hit
the ground. The three newcomers charged out.

"What the hell?" Snively dropped his book and flicked on a switch on the

>console. The surveillance monitors lit up, showing the terrain all around the
main unit. He stared at the screens. There was smoke, and SWATS running

>around. He frowned.
"SWATbots!" he yelled into the loudspeaker.

"What is going on!?"

>One SWATbot replied into his wrist communicator. "Sir, there has been an
attack by rebels...rebels not yet spotted."

>"Well then, find them!" Snively practically screamed. "NOW!"
"Yes sir," replied the SWAT.

"Man, there's a lot of them," whispered Vass, as 'bots raced by their

>hiding place, beneath one of the oil transports.
"Look, Neo," said Ana. "You go in and download any files you can from the
ship. That way we'll have a little bonus. When you come out...we'll trash this
thing."

>"You sure you can fight 'em if they find you?" asked Neo.
"Yes!" said Ana. "Now go!"

>Neophyte crawled out from beneath the transport and raced towards the
main
unit. Several SWATbots fired at her, but she kept running, drawing her own laser

>gun from her belt. Three 'bots ahead of her fell to her precise shooting.<p>

She entered the main unit, and tramped down the hallways. Behind her, a
>trail of smoking SWATbot bodies littered the floor. She was coming to the front
of the ship, her boots stomping loudly upon the metal panels of the floor.

>"Oh shit," sighed Snively, as he heard her footsteps in the hallway.
"Just
my luck..." He leapt out of the chair and ran to the door.
Gingerly, he
>peered out and gasped.
The girl was charging towards him, her brown eyes glittering. He
>yanked his head back in and slammed the door shut. He reached for the button
that would lock the door...but it flew open.

"Hello," said Neophyte, grinning evilly at the little man as he took a
>step away.
He grabbed for the pistol in his belt...no doubt the same gun that had
>killed Cyto.
"Oh no you don't!" she snarled, grabbing his wrist, and slamming him hard
>against the console.
She wrenched the gun away from him, and threw it up onto the console.
>"You little bastard," she said, throwing him in the chair.
She inserted a disk into one of the slots on the console. "How do I

>download files?" she demanded.
He glared at her. "Go to hell, bitch."
>"That's not the answer I wanted," she growled, lunging at him. Her hand
closed around his throat, squeezing hard. He gasped for air, trying to shove
>her arm away. "Tell me!" she hollered.
He shook his head, so she drew back a powerful fist, the knuckles standing
>out in a bony ridge. "Tell me..." she threatened.
He tried to pry her hand off his neck, but she only tightened her fingers
>more. "Tell me!"
He tried to nod, but before he could, she threw her fist forward, driving
>it hard into his stomach. She released her grip and watched as he doubled over,
clutching at his belly.
>She waited. He finally sat up, cheeks flushed and tears shimmering in his
eyes. "I...I...was going to tell you..."
>"Shut up. Just get me in the files."
"What files?" he wheezed.

>"All of them, you stupid prick."
He typed in a few commands, entered a password she didn't catch, and sat
>back. She watched as the computer screen lit up; in blinking letters it read:
"Downloading all files to multi-disc...downloading in progress...20%
>completed..."
"Very good," she said.
>He just glared.
She stooped down, picking up the book. "Naughty Girls...nice cover." She
>flipped it open to the dog-ear where he had hastily marked his page.
"Let's
see...she moaned in pleasure, squirming as Lisa's tongue..."
>Neo dropped the book. "Man, you are a pervert," she said.
He stared at her.
>"I remember...you were eyeing me back in Robotropolis too..."
"Shut up," he said, looking away.
>Neo turned back to the screen. "25% done...must be a lot of files.
What
are they, anyway?"
>She looked over at him, and found him staring at her, biting his

lip.
"What are you looking at?" she demanded.
>"Nothing," he said, his voice raspy. There were strange lights gleaming in
his azure eyes.
>She glanced at the screen again. On one of the surveillance screens, she
watched Ana and Vass fight off some 'bots. Then she noticed the switch to the intercom.
She pointed towards the button. "Order those robots to back off."
>He shook his head.
"Do it now!"
>When she raised her fist, he reached for the button. "All SWATbots, leave
the intruders alone. Repeat... leave them alone."
>Neo watched with a satisfied smile as the SWATbots ceased their attack on
Ana and Vass.
>"Very good, Sniveler," she said. She pushed the button. "Ana! Come in
here!"
>The kitsune looked around.
"I've got the one who killed Cyto!" said Neo. She released the button. "You know, Snively...what today is?" She rested a hand on one of his skinny shoulders, feeling him tremble under her touch.
"What?" he asked, his voice shaking as well.
>"It's the day...that you die..."<p>

Ana walked into the main unit, eager to confront the one who had killed
>Cyto. She glanced over her shoulder before entering, to see Sonic and Vass
talking from where they sat on a flat boulder. She waved to them, and stepped
>inside.
She walked down the corridor, eyeing the SWATbot bodies with an amused
>smile, and then entered the main room.
"Hey Neo!" she called.
>Neophyte rose up, smiling, probably to hug the kitsune. Snively's eye
caught the glint of his laser pistol, where it rested on the console. He
>slipped silently out of the chair, standing on his tiptoes. Neo was hugging
Ana, in a warm friendly embrace.
>***How sweet**, thought Snively, taking a quiet step towards the console, and reaching out his hand.
The cool metal of the trigger felt good against his finger. That small
>piece of metal he held in his hand made him so powerful, and he smiled evilly.
It was time to kill...

Chapter 6

Neo stepped away from Ana, and turned to see her captive pivot around on
>his foot, holding the laser pistol in his small hand.
She leapt towards him, reaching him in two steps, and grabbed his wrist.
>He shrieked, pulling the trigger. Neo felt the heat of the laser shot whiz past
her face, and it blazed through the ceiling. A shaft of sunlight shone through.
>"You little freak!" she growled, twisting his wrist. The pistol fell to
the ground. Neo threw Snively back into the chair and stooped to pick up the
>pistol.
She shoved the barrel against his head. "Any last words?"
>His eyes widened and he looked around frantically, catching sight of

Ana.
She looked friendlier than Neo, and he gave her a pleading look.

>"Wait Neo," said Ana, stepping closer to Snively.
Phew, I'm saved. The kitsune won't let her kill me.

>"Hello, little man," said Ana, smiling at Snively.
He nodded at her, relieved as Neo pulled the pistol away from him. Neo >raised her eyebrow at Ana, who was grinning cheerfully at the human. **Has she
lost her mind?**

>Ana smiled wider. Snively began to feel a little more at ease.
Then Ana punched him, her fist slamming into his cheek, snapping his head

>sideways and throwing him over the arm of the chair. He pushed himself back into the seat, and raised his head to stare at Ana in shock.
She was shaking her hand and snarling, and he felt fear creep into his

>body--both females wanted to hurt him, to kill him.<p>

Neo tucked the pistol into her belt. Then she bent down and drew a dagger

>from her boot. "A laser is too quick," she said.
Ana bit her lip. **Oh Neo, I WANT it to be quick!**

Snively gasped as Neo raised the dagger up to his face, running the blade

>down his uninjured cheek. He felt the blade, the edge sharper than a razor,
trace a bloody line through his skin. Neo lifted the knife, holding it in front

>of his left eye. "Should we gouge out his eyes first?" she asked. "To avenge
Cyto?"

>Snively shook in fear as Neo delicately brought the knife closer to his
eye. Now his vision was filled with a silvery blur--the knife was mere

>centimeters away. "Oh please," he said, "please, don't do this..."
Neo drew the knife away. "Why not?"

>He trembled, tears starting to gather in his eyes.

"Because..."
"Not a good enough answer, buddy," snorted the human girl.

>She began to bring the knife close again, but Snively shoved her hand
away. "Oooh, getting tough, are we?" sneered Neo. "I don't like that!" She

>stabbed the knife downwards, straight through his left hand, pinning it to the
arm of the chair.

>He threw back his head and screamed an ear-piercing howl. Neo pulled the knife from his hand, and wiped the blade off on her pants. Blood dripped down the arm of the chair, splattering the ground.
"Let's just kill him," said Ana, her face twisting at the sight of the

>blood. "C'mon, Neo, let's just shoot him and get out of here."
Neo was stone-faced. "C'mon, Neo," said Ana again. "Sonic and Vass are

>waiting."
Neo snorted, but put the knife back in her boot, and pulled out the gun.

>She handed it to Ana. "You do it."
Ana took the gun and pressed it against his head. He shook harder, looking

>up at her with tear-filled eyes--a miserable stare. Her finger tightened on the trigger. He blinked, and the tears streamed down over his cheeks--one bleeding, and one starting to bruise.
"Cyto--this is for you..."

>His wide eyes pleaded with her. "No, please, please don't kill me, please,
I'm begging you," he sobbed.

>Ana stared down at him. **This isn't right. Killing him doesn't bring back
Cyto.**

>"Do it," urged Neo. "Pull the trigger."
Ana shook a little, her eyes locked with his.

>"Do it," repeated Neo. "C'mon Ana, blow him away!"
Ana hesitated still.

>"Ana, come on." She lowered her voice. "Look, Ana, it won't hurt him. Just
do it."

>Ana lowered the gun. "I can't."
Neo grabbed the pistol. "I can."

>"No!" said Ana. "Don't do it. Let's just go."
Neo sighed heavily.
"Fine."

>**Sorry, Cyto. Maybe next time--when she's not around.** She tucked the pistol back in her belt. Ana was already out the door. Neo cast one more glance at the trembling lackey before following Ana. He was whimpering, eyes shut, clutching his wounded hand. She snarled silently.
Next time, Snively, you won't be so lucky...

"You done?" asked Sonic, as the two girls came out of the convoy. He noticed Ana's black-booted feet moved much more lightly than before.
She feels better. That's cool. He smiled his flashy confident grin. "Now, for a dramatic exit! Any ideas?"

>"Yeah," said Neophyte. "Puncture all the gas tanks and light 'em on fire."
Sonic grinned wider. "Will do!"

>He zoomed over to an oil unit, and revved up into a spin dash, and cut a small gash in the gas tank. The clear liquid splashed onto the ground. The four other gas units, and the main unit were also vandalized.
Then Sonic picked up two stones and hit them together. Sparks flew and one twinkling shard of fire drifted down into the gas. -Phoom- It caught and lit, the fire racing towards one of the oil units.

>He ran back to the group. "Grab on!" He took off, with the three holding on to him.

>"Now watch this!" he said, when they were a safe distance away. The fire reached the oil unit and blazed there for a second. Then, with an explosion

>that flattened the three animal's ears against their skulls, and made Neo cover her own ears, the oil unit blew up. Bits of debris clattered to the ground.

>Like dominos, the second and third units went.
"Sweet ass!" said Neo.

>Another explosion nearly knocked them off their feet--the last two oil units had gone at the same time. Now the flames danced merrily over the ground,

>heading towards the main unit.<p>

In the main unit, Snively was cowering on the floor, his hands clamped over his head. After the last explosion, he lifted his head, trembling.
Warily, he approached one of the side windows and peered out. Fire was flickering outside. Glancing over at the surveillance monitors, he saw the oil units were gone--fire and scrap metal were all that remained.

>One of the surveillance monitors showed the area around the main unit's gas tank. He gasped--gas was spraying out of a gash in the tank, and fire was creeping near.

>"Oh no," he moaned, staring at the screen for a second.
Then he turned, and ran for the door, bolting past 'dead' SWATbots in the

>hallway. He squeezed out the door before it had even fully opened and leapt out
of the unit. Panting, he ran towards the boulders, his ears catching the
>peculiar -phoom- noise as the gasoline lit. He ran faster, and dove behind a
large boulder, throwing his hands out to break his fall, and let out a scream as
>rocks and gravel were embedded in his wound.
The explosion rocked the ground. Scrap metal crashed down, some of it
>burning and melting as it hit the earth.<p>

"All right!" yelled Sonic and Vass in unison. They gave each other high
>fives. Neo raised a cheerful fist and even Ana let out a shout of victory.
"You guys'll make great Freedom Fighters," exclaimed Sonic. "Now, let's
>get back home!"
They all grabbed onto Sonic, and he zoomed off, a trail of dust rising
>behind him.<p>

Snively finally peered out from behind the boulder. Sonic had left--the bushes were still rustling from his trademark hurricane-like wind.
>The convoy was just a pile of smoking debris on the ground. The metallic
corpses of SWATbots littered the ground around the wreckage.
>Snively walked down the slight incline to the rubble and looked around.
Not one SWATbot had survived. Not one drop of oil remained. He looked to the horizon--the city of Robotropolis was nowhere in sight--a few days walk, at the least.
"Fuck," he said softly, sinking down to his knees beside a SWATbot. He
>glanced over at it, and then noticed its arm was still intact--the arm that held the communicator.<p>

He drew in a deep breath. **He's going to be so angry...he's going to kill me for this.**
>He felt like punching himself--but didn't. Robotnik would have plenty of
that in store when he arrived home.
>**I hate my life**, he thought bitterly, before reaching for the communicator.<p>

Ana smiled as she looked around KnotHole. "Yes, we did it," she said.
>"That convoy is history," added Sonic.
"Good job," said Sally, giving Sonic a kiss. She looked at the three
>newcomers, as Sonic rubbed his cheek, grinning. "And you did a good job as
well!"
>"Thanks," said Neo.<p>

Later that night, the moon was half-full over the trees of the Great Forest. Anacharis gazed at it through the infirmary window, but then looked to
the door when it squeaked softly.
>Neo entered, and sat on her bed. "You feel better, Ana?"
"Yeah," said the kitsune. "I miss Cyto..."

>"I do too."
"...but he wouldn't want me to be sad. 'Too soft,
Ana', that's what he'd
>probably say, right?" She let out a soft quavering laugh. "But he
was a fighter-he wouldn't want me to stop fighting."
>Neophyte
nodded. "I'm glad you realized that."
>Ana looked back up at the moon. "So, in Cyto's honor, I dedicate my
life
>to the fight for Mobius's freedom."
>Before she lowered her eyes, Ana saw a brilliant star streak across
the
sky.

THE END!

End
file.